TL 6545

ASIA WATCH

739 Eighth Street SE, Washington DC 20003
(202) 546-9336

JACK GREENBERG
Chairman
■
ARYEH NEIER
Vice Chairman
■
MATTHEW NIMETZ
Vice Chairman
■
ERIC SCHWARTZ
Program Director
■
HOLLY BURKHALTER
Washington Representative
■
SUSAN OSNOS
Press Director

TESTIMONY OF ARYEH NEIER ON BEHALF OF ASIA WATCH

August 12, 1988

BEFORE THE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONIZATION

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to bring to the attention of this Committee Asia Watch's continuing concerns about human rights conditions in East Timor. Asia Watch, which was founded by the Fund for Free Expression in 1985 and is associated with Americas Watch and Helsinki Watch, has closely monitored human rights conditions in Indonesia and East Timor, as well as more than a dozen other countries in Asia. Although the issue of self-determination is beyond the scope of Asia Watch's mandate, we believe that this Committee's deliberations should continue to take place in the context of a broader concern for ongoing violations of fundamental human rights in East Timor.

ASIA WATCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

■ Floyd Abrams ■ Edward J. Baker ■ Robert L. Bernstein ■ Tom A. Bernstein ■ Julie Brill ■ Clarence Dias ■ Dolores A. Donovan ■ Adrienne Germain ■ Merle Goldman ■ Deborah M. Greenberg ■ David Hawk ■ Liang Heng ■ Jeri Laber ■ Virginia Leary ■ Amit Pandya ■ Dith Pran ■ Sheila Rothman ■ Barnett Rubin ■ James Scott ■ Judith Shapiro ■ Sophie C. Silberberg ■ Nadine Strossen

The Fund for Free Expression is the parent organization of the Americas Watch, Helsinki Watch and Asia Watch

I would like at the outset to emphasize several overarching concerns. First, the Indonesian Government's continuing refusal to grant access to East Timor by human rights organizations and other monitors in itself presents a serious threat to the fundamental rights of East Timor's residents. Experience throughout the world has proved that human rights violations tend to flourish when independent monitoring is prevented; the Indonesian government's denial of access to East Timor is cause for especially serious concern in view of the recent history of massive human rights violations there.

Restraints on access also make it impossible, of course, to obtain comprehensive information about current human rights conditions in East Timor, and substantially impede efforts to verify reports that do emerge. Nevertheless, reliable information about human rights conditions that has emerged from East Timor makes clear the need for continued concern on the part of the international community.

OVERVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Thirteen years after Indonesia's invasion of East Timor, the worst excesses of the occupation forces have abated, but the Timorese people continue to suffer daily violations of fundamental rights. The rights to freedom of speech, association and movement remain subject to severe restrictions. Residents consistently describe a climate of fear, reinforced by

a pervasive security apparatus.

Asia Watch continues to receive reports of disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions in East Timor. Although the number of such reports has diminished in recent years, continued restrictions on access to East Timor make it virtually impossible to obtain and verify information about these practices on a timely basis. And the Indonesian government's failure to account for all but a handful of the many thousands thought to have "disappeared" since 1975 is a continuing affront to the rule of law.

Welcome progress on another front has also served to highlight recent violations. In the past year, over one hundred of political prisoners have been released from East Timor's prisons. By all accounts, they were convicted under procedures lacking any semblance of fair process. Released prisoners and relatives of those still detained describe a pattern of severe abuse during the early days of the prisoners' detention. It appears likely, moreover, that arbitrary patterns of arrest and detention continue to be prevalent, particularly in areas outside East Timor's capital, Dili.

ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION

One of the most visible apparent improvements in the human rights situation in East Timor has been large-scale releases of

political prisoners in recent years. Since August 1987, some 150 political prisoners have been released from prisons in Dili. According to the Indonesian state news agency, Antara, the release of 52 prisoners in February 1988 brought the number of officially-acknowledged, non-criminal prisoners in Dili down to 11. Asia Watch believes that a few more have been released since then.

Most of the recently-released prisoners had nearly completed their sentences, and were released in accordance with a standard policy on remission of sentences. But the mass releases cannot be explained solely in terms of standard practice; some of those released in February 1988 had substantial sentences remaining. It is widely thought that the releases were prompted, at least in part, by the sustained attention to human rights conditions in East Timor generated by the United Nations.

The releases are, of course, a welcome development. They have nonetheless served to highlight a pattern of arbitrariness that characterized the released prisoners' arrests and detention. They have also raised the question whether there has been any fundamental change in the pattern of arrest and detention of political suspects in East Timor. Asia Watch believes that arrest and detention practices continue to suffer from a pattern of lawlessness constituting a denial of internationally-recognized standards of justice.

Circumstances of Past Arrests and Detentions

Most of the prisoners released in recent years had been arrested since 1983; perhaps the majority were arrested during Operasi Sapu Bersih (Operation Clean Sweep), following the collapse of the ceasefire in August 1983. Typically, the detainees were held for an initial period of detention at the district or sub-district military command in the area where they were arrested and then were transferred to Comarca Prison in Dili.

Information based upon testimony of former prisoners and relatives of prisoners indicates that virtually all of the prisoners who were arrested in 1983-84 were initially held for long periods of incommunicado detention, during which many were tortured. Some later "disappeared." On April 27, 1985, 50 detainees arrested during Operasi Sapu Bersih were released without having been charged or tried.

Between 1983 and 1987, some 350 detainees were tried -- all were convicted -- before the District Court in Dili. It appears that these trials were based largely on formal confessions taken during police interrogations at the public prosecutor's office in Dili in a building formerly used by the Club Benfica. Based upon interviews with former detainees and relatives of detainees, Asia Watch believes that two key forms of treatment were systematically employed to obtain their confessions.

First, it appears that none of the prisoners was allowed to

see his relatives until he was tried (or, in the case of those released without trial in April 1985, until his release). The detainees at Comarca apparently were told by their interrogators that they had no right to see their families until they were tried, and were urged to confess so that the trials could proceed and they could resume contact with their families.

Second, it appears that the public prosecutor often persuaded detainees to testify against other detainees from their own area, and then "bootstrapped" each witness's testimony to build a case against him. Typically, when a detainee was being questioned by the police in Dili, two other prisoners from his home town would be present. If the first detainee signed the statement, the two witnesses would also sign it, and the statement would form the basis of a prosecution.

By signing the statement, the witnesses would not merely be attesting to the fact that they saw the defendant sign the confession; they would be attesting to personal knowledge of the truth of the facts in the confession. By "admitting" that they had personal knowledge of a defendant's guilt, these "witnesses" often implicated themselves.* In fact, in cases where witnesses

---

* This apparently happened in two sets of cases publicized by Amnesty International: 1) Carlos Freitas and Jacinto Freitas, both from Wailili, testified against Sebastiao Sarmento, who was also from Wailili. All three were tried and convicted in February 1985. 2) Jose Belo, Jose Freitas and Jose Ximenes -- all of whom are from Gariwai -- reportedly testified against Rafael Xavier, and each became a defendant himself. All four were convicted. According to Amnesty International, "[a]ll of the men in question were peasants with almost no education, and it is unlikely that they understood the consequences of their agreement to sign

cooperated with the public prosecutor's efforts, they typically were later tried themselves -- often in short order. According to one of the court-appointed lawyers who represented the defendants in the Dili trials, it was "quite normal for an inmate to appear one day on the stand and the next day in the dock."*

By all accounts, the trials in Dili violated international standards of due process. The trials appear to have been perfunctory, with little preparation by defense counsel.

Perhaps the most striking indication that defendants were not permitted to contest the charges against them is that only one of the defendants tried in recent years has sought to appeal his sentence.

A relative of one convicted prisoner told Asia Watch that the defendant was told that he had to accept his sentence, and that if he "complained" about it -- i.e., appealed it -- he would get a heavier sentence on appeal.** Another prisoner who at first refused to accept his sentence reportedly was threatened. The prisoner told another detainee that "the military just put in front of him a gun and a pen to choose between." (It appears that the defendant was asked to sign a document signifying his

---

the [interrogation statements] and testify against each other." Amnesty International, "East Timor: Unfair Trials and Further Releases of Political Prisoners," April 1988 (AI Index: ASA 21/08/88.)

* "Political prisoners get fast justice in court," Far Eastern Economic Review, August 8, 1985 (apparently paraphrasing source).

** The Indonesian Criminal Procedures Code permits appellate courts to increase defendants' sentences.

acceptance of the verdict at the time the sentence was rendered.)

Current Arrest and Detention Practices

If the arbitrary nature of arrests, detentions and trials from 1983 through 1985 is clear, more recent patterns cannot be established with certainty. With human rights organizations unable to visit East Timor, what can be said about current arrest and detention practices is largely limited to official pronouncements and unconfirmed reports.

Official action taken in recent years is generally in the direction of improvement: In recent years, the Indonesian government has emptied the detention center on the island of Atauro, which had held over 4,000 prisoners in 1982.* The closing of Atauro is consistent with the government's broader efforts, noted above, to release political prisoners in East Timor.

Moreover, since 1985, at least some degree of independent monitoring of detainees has been possible. In March 1985 the Indonesian government agreed to allow representatives of the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a neutral humanitarian agency, to visit Timorese prisoners. The government also agreed to provide the ICRC lists of detainees

---

* This process began in 1985 and continued throughout 1987. International Committee of the Red Cross, The ICRC Worldwide 1987, at 21.

undergoing interrogation to whom the ICRC did not have access.* Since then, the ICRC has periodically visited Timorese prisoners at two places of detention in Dili -- Becora and Comarca** -- and at two prisons in Jakarta where some Timorese have been sent to complete their prison terms -- Cipinang and Tangerang.***

It is widely asserted, however, that the Indonesian government continues to maintain a "shadow detention system" to which the ICRC has no access, in which detainees continue to be held without charge or trial.**** Two Timorese refugees in Lisbon who had worked with the ICRC before leaving East Timor***** told Asia Watch of instances in which they had learned of places outside Dili where detainees were held without charge or trial --and without notification to the ICRC.

It is, of course, impossible for Asia Watch to confirm such

---

* International Committee of the Red Cross, Annual Report 1985, at 60.

** Becora is operated by the Ministry of Justice, and holds both criminal and political prisoners. Comarca, which is administered by the army, is now supposed to be used only for soldiers who commit offenses.

*** International Committee of the Red Cross, Annual Report 1985, at 60; Annual Report 1986, at 58-59. In 1987, ICRC delegates made three series of visits to detainees in East Timor, seeing a total of 231 detainees. International Committee of the Red Cross, The ICRC Worldwide 1987, at 21.

**** See, e.g., "A 'hidden holocaust' in the Pacific," The Boston Globe, December 13, 1987.

***** The refugees were employees of the Indonesian Red Cross, which collaborates with the ICRC in its humanitarian work in East Timor.

reports.* Nevertheless, the nature of arrest procedures in East Timor makes it likely that the basic allegations are true. There is a military command in each subdistrict and each district; the former is known as KORAMIL, and the latter as KODIM. Even if a detainee were eventually charged and tried in Dili, he would likely be arrested and initially detained by local authorities. Thus there can be little doubt that Indonesian military authorities operate detention facilities at a local level throughout East Timor.

Timorese refugees say that the Babinsa, a military supervisor who operates at the village level, sometimes arrests people and sends them to KORAMIL, which may detain the suspect at its own facility, release him, or send him on to KODIM. KODIM, in turn, may either detain the suspect, release him, or transfer him to Dili, where he might be detained at the military headquarters, KOREM -- again without charge or trial -- or might be prosecuted.

Asia Watch has also continued to receive reports that FRETILIN suspects are detained by the Red Berets (Kopassandha), an elite army commando regiment. For example, Cristiano Costa, a former detainee who presented testimony before the United Nations Human Rights Commission earlier this year, claims that, following attacks by FRETILIN in the villages of Laisoro-Lai and Seical on

---

* With limited exceptions, the ICRC follows a policy of strict confidentiality respecting its detention visits, and thus cannot provide information that might tend to confirm or contradict these reports.

August 17, 1987, the Red Berets "rounded up" a number of suspects and detained them at the Hotel Flamboyan, where some were beaten.

Asia Watch has received information about another detention by the Red Berets in Dili, said to have begun in late 1986 and to have lasted at least nine months. Relatives of the detainee reportedly were threatened "not to say anything" about the detention.

In conclusion, Asia Watch believes that detainees continue to be detained at KODIM and lower-level military facilities without charge or trial. We also believe that detentions of several months' duration at these levels are probably relatively common.*

TORTURE

Like reports of arbitrary arrest and detention, reports of torture of detainees in East Timor persist, but are difficult to verify. Instances of torture of some of the detainees arrested

---

* As noted below, there continue to be reports of torture at such facilities; the fact that these detention centers are not visited by ICRC representatives or by independent investigators increases the risk of such abuses.

It is not clear whether the ICRC could visit such detention centers if it sought permission. Its annual reports for 1985 and 1986 say that ICRC representatives have visited Comarca and Becora, but do not indicate whether attempts were made to visit other detention facilities. To our knowledge, the ICRC generally attempts to visit all detention facilities where detainees may be held for politically-related offenses, but some governments deny the group permission to visit pre-trial detention centers even though they permit ICRC visits to prisons.

in 1983 have been reliably reported, and appear to reflect a widespread pattern of treatment of persons arrested during Operasi Sapu Bersih. Some more recent reports of abuse appear to be credible. There are some indications that Indonesian authorities have recently made efforts to curb torture; the lack of access to East Timor makes it impossible to confirm such possible trends.

Cristiano Costa

Cristiano Costa, who was arrested on August 28, 1983 in Baucau and detained at the KODIM-1628 command there for five days, says that he was severely abused during the second and third nights of his detention. He says he was interrogated on those occasions by three "Indonesians," who were assisted by a Timorese translator. The former were led by a Captain A. Haryanto, and included two sergeants, one of whom was named Sukadi.

Costa, whose two front teeth are missing, told Asia Watch:

> On the second night, they started beating me, and this is when they broke my teeth .... [They] started to beat me. Then I fell face down and I was on the floor with my face down and they stepped on my head with their boots while I was still on the floor and that's how I broke my teeth.

The following night, the same group interrogated Costa again. This time, Costa recalls, they applied electric shocks with a machine that looked like "one of those old-fashioned telephones that you have to crank, and there was some kind of battery or small generator." Two wires that extended from this

device were attached to various parts of Costa's body, and "the electric current came through when they did this cranking," Costa told Americas Watch. Costa, who was transferred to Comarca five days after his arrest, says he was also beaten for the first two weeks of his detention -- i.e., at both KODIM-1628 and in Comarca.

Albino Lourdes

Albino Lourdes, who is currently imprisoned at Cipinang in Jakarta, was arrested twice in 1983 and reportedly was severely abused each time. Lourdes, who was employed as a nurse in the military hospital in Dili, was first arrested in mid-January 1983 and was detained by KODIM in Dili for 15 days. He was accused of "contacting the people in the bush," but was not formally charged with a crime. After his release, Lourdes told someone whom Asia Watch was able to interview that he was beaten and given electric shocks. Then,

> [T]hey put a table on top of his body, and four soldiers got on it. In the morning they took all his clothes off and took him to the seaside with his hands tied behind his back. And then, with the Indonesians holding on to the other side of the rope, they kept throwing him into the water and every five minutes or so they would pull him out.

When Lourdes was about to be released, he was warned that if he told anyone about his treatment, he would be rearrested -- "but this time, the treatment would be far worse."

Lourdes was arrested again on August 12, 1983, this time by agents of KOREM. That night, he was once again given electric

shocks and was beaten with rifle butts.*

Reports of Torture in 1986 and 1987

Because of restrictions on access to East Timor, continuing reports of torture tend to emerge long after the alleged incident occurred. The most recent reports of torture which have been corroborated generally concern abuses said to have taken place in 1986 and 1987.

One of these involved Aleixo Guterres, who was arrested in late 1986 and was accused of collaborating with FRETILIN. Guterres was detained by KOTIS, the intelligence branch of the regional military command. While detained, Guterres reportedly was beaten severely and was burned with lighted cigarettes.**

A more recent victim of torture was Vicente de Sousa, a retired nurse who was arrested by Indonesian military officers on February 14, 1987. De Sousa reportedly was accused of having desecrated a statue in front of a church in Dili, and was detained for one week by KOTIS. While detained, de Sousa

---

* The following day, he and several other prisoners were taken to Bali. In November 1983, Lourdes's family learned for the first time that he had been returned to Dili and was detained at Comarca. They were unable to see him, however, until after his trial in March 1984. Lourdes was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment, having been found guilty of supplying clothes and medicines to the armed resistance.

** See Amnesty International, "Indonesia/East Timor: Allegations of Torture," March 1988 (AI Index: ASA 21/05/88). Guterres was tried in early 1987 and was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.

reportedly was beaten and submerged in a tank.*

Asia Watch has been able to obtain independent corroboration of another reported instance of torture publicized by Amnesty International. Celestino Freitas, a former village chief from Samalari, Baucau, was detained on October 12, 1986 by Indonesian Special Forces. Although Freitas was accused of having links to FRETILIN,** Asia Watch believes that he was denounced by someone for personal reasons. While detained, Freitas reportedly was subjected to electric shocks during interrogations. Under these circumstances, he reportedly implicated two other men -- Egidio Freitas and Patricio Da Luz -- who later were said to have been arrested and tortured themselves.***

Three members of hansip from Venilale, Baucau are also reported to have been arrested in November 1986 and tortured because they did not repay money borrowed from the sub-district military commander of Venilale. The three, Domingos Guterres from Liabala, Uatu Haku; a different Domingos Guterres from Lua Ili, Waila'a; and Tito Guterres from Uatu Haku, reportedly were released in March 1987 after four months' detention.****

---

* See id. Under the circumstances of de Sousa's reported detention, the ICRC would not, under its current arrangement with the Indonesian government, have been in a position to visit de Sousa while he was detained.

** The charge apparently grew out of a recent murder of a civilian militiaman, possibly committed by FRETILIN.

*** See Amnesty International, "Indonesia/East Timor: Allegations of Torture," March 1988 (AI Index: ASA 21/05/88).

**** See id.

Recent Patterns

Some observers with access to East Timor believe that Indonesian authorities no longer routinely torture captured guerrillas or suspected FRETILIN supporters. This change, they say, reflects a fundamental policy change emanating from Jakarta.

Informed observers are quick to point out, however, that the process of implementing such a decision is slow; under the best of circumstances, it would take a long time for the effects of such a centralized policy shift to reach remote villages. They also note that the situation can change at any time, and deteriorate rapidly.

While Asia Watch welcomes indications that the Indonesian government may have adopted a new policy to curb torture in East Timor, it is clear that any such policy, to be truly effective, must be supported by a formal system of adequate safeguards. Among these, we believe it essential that the government establish adequate procedures for investigating reported incidents of torture and punishing those responsible. Additionally, until East Timor is open to independent human rights monitors, there can be no assurances that torture and other abuses have ended and will not recur.

DISAPPEARANCES

The number of Timorese who have "disappeared"* since 1975 may never be known, but by all estimates the numbers are staggering. Sources whom Asia Watch judges credible place the number in the many thousands. With the exception of a dozen or so cases which the Indonesian government has clarified to the United Nations -- all were found alive -- the government has failed to provide a public accounting of the disappeared.

Today, there are relatively few documented cases of disappearances. This may be partly a function of the typically long lapse between a person's disappearance and the reporting of it by relatives, but Asia Watch believes that there has probably been a decline in the rate of disappearances since 1983-84, when sweeping human rights abuses attended Operasi Sapu Bersih.

Large numbers of suspects detained during that military operation entered the grim ledger of East Timor's disappeared during that period. They include five residents of Baucau who were arrested in August 1983: Adolfo Fraga; Antonio Espirito Santo; Benjamin Guterres; Isidoro Ximenes; and Carlos Alves. Before his own arrest on August 28, 1983, Cristiano Costa saw the five being arrested with their hands tied behind their backs and taken away in an army vehicle.

---

* Asia Watch uses the term "disappearance" to refer to circumstances in which it appears that a person was taken into custody by agents of the state, and in which government authorities later deny responsibility for or knowledge of the person's whereabouts.

The five were taken to Dili, and from there to Kupang some months after their arrest. Other prisoners taken to Kupang who later returned to Dili told Cristiano Costa that the five who disappeared were taken from detention in Kupang, and never returned.

Other prisoners were taken from Comarca prison in pairs at night in or around November 1983, and were never seen again. These pairs of disappeared include Paulo Mesquita and Alfonso Lorenzo Pereira; Paulo Rodrigues and Feliciano Mau-Siri; and Julio Maio and Marcelino Pinto. Helder Araujo and Joao Carvalho Belo were later taken from Comarca, separately.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

Like reports of disappearances, reports of extrajudicial executions have declined since 1983-84. Periodic reports nonetheless persist -- and are difficult to verify.

Reports of extrajudicial executions that have emerged from East Timor in recent years but which have not been corroborated include the following:

- On February 23, 1986, an inmate of a prison in Ossu, Viqueque whose name was "Armando" reportedly was stabbed to death by a military officer and a member of hansip.

- On March 3, 1986 Vatxu Tani reportedly was killed by members of the First Marine Battalion. Vatxu Tani, a tribal chief in Maluro, Lore, Viqueque, reportedly was arrested because he opposed the marines' efforts to cut down casava plants -- a local food staple, which the marines believed provided cover for FRETILIN guerrillas. The victim is said to have been taken on a

flight to Lospalos and to have been killed by officers accompanying him during the flight.

- Julio Sarmento reportedly was captured while participating in a FRETILIN raid in Holorua, Same and taken to a post of the Indonesian Special Forces in Ainaro. There, he reportedly was tortured during interrogation and then shot on September 4, 1986.*

- Domingos da Costa and Gasper, both of whom were members of hansip, the civilian militia, reportedly were shot to death on February 24, 1988 by the 721 Battalion of the Indonesian Army during a patrol in the Cumoli-Venilale zone.

While it has not been possible for independent human rights organizations to verify these reports, the serious allegations merit investigation by the Indonesian government.** Yet Asia Watch is not aware of any investigations of reports of human rights violations in East Timor by the Indonesian government. Despite the massive human rights abuses committed by Indonesian forces since the beginning of the occupation, not a single violation has been the subject of prosecution.

RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENT, SPEECH AND ASSOCIATION

By all accounts, residents of East Timor suffer daily violations of fundamental freedoms. One informed observer described the situation this way: "Freedom of movement, association and speech is in no way even imaginable" in East

---

* The first three cases were described in the Statement of Amnesty International before this Committee on August 13, 1987.

** See id.

Timor.

Some restraints are embodied in formal controls. For example, residents need a travel permit to move from one region of East Timor to another; both civilian and military authorities must approve these permits. When permission is granted, the traveler must report to local military authorities upon his or her arrival at the approved destination. In areas where FRETILIN operates, residents reportedly are subject to even tighter controls; permits are needed for even local movement.

Mail is subjected to official scrutiny. Permission is required both to leave and enter East Timor, and these controls continue to be used to seal the territory off from the rest of the world. No human rights organization has been allowed inside East Timor, and few journalists have been able to visit. In recent years, the government has allowed a several journalists and diplomats inside East Timor, but their visits were strictly regulated. East Timor Governor Mario Viegas Carrascalao has recently called on President Suharto to open the territory to outsiders, but no decision has yet been made in response to his suggestion.

But the most far-reaching restraints are less tangible. They inhere in the intelligence network that pervades East Timor. KOPSCAM, the local arm of the state security apparatus KOPKAMTIB, maintains an extensive network of intelligence agents, and its local informants are believed to be omnipresent. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, whenever two or more Timorese are

together, the suspicion exists that one may be an informant. Whether the perception is justified or not, it exists, and instills a brooding sense of apprehension in the daily lives of East Timor's residents. One recently-arrived refugee in Lisbon recalled, "Everything we used to do, everywhere we used to go and people we talked to -- they always knew."

Under these circumstances, speech is guarded, even among close friends. Although residents are not legally forbidden to listen to foreign broadcasts or to speak Portuguese, many avoid doing both, fearing that the secret police will infer a hostile attitude toward Indonesian authority. Residents also avoid meeting socially in even small groups; they say that Indonesian authorities regard such gatherings with suspicion.

Timorese thought to have reason to be sympathetic to FRETILIN -- former political prisoners, for example, or relatives of guerrillas -- are periodically summoned for questioning by military authorities, including miliary intelligence agents.

Many Timorese refugees whom Asia Watch has interviewed in recent months believe that the human rights situation in East Timor has improved in recent years. But each interview evokes stark images of the continuing harshness of Indonesian rule. The fact that virtually all of our contacts have asked not to be identified in our public statements, fearing retaliation against relatives still in East Timor, is eloquent testimony to this.

CONCLUSION

As my remarks suggest, Asia Watch believes that serious human rights violations persist in East Timor on a wide scale, despite some apparent improvements. We believe, moreover, that human rights conditions will remain poor as long as the territory is sealed off from the ameliorating effects of public scrutiny.

For this reason, Governor Carrascalao's proposal to lift the ban on access to the territory, now the subject of discussion within the Indonesian government, is potentially one of the most significant developments in recent years. As this issue is debated within Indonesia, Asia Watch believes it critical that the international community make known in a strong and united voice the critical importance it attaches to the ending of East Timor's isolation. Accordingly, we urge this Committee to press in unambiguous terms for the lifting of all barriers to communication -- including travel -- between East Timor and the international community.